



The Naturalist

Celebrating 51 Years of Bird Conservation



Greg Lavaty

Volume 39, Number 1

January/February 2020

Behind the Scenes at the High Island Sanctuaries

Speaker: Pete Deichmann, Coastal Sanctuaries Manager

Date: Thursday, January 9, 2020
Place: United Way Center, 50 Waugh
Time: Social at 7:00 p.m.
Presentation at 7:30 p.m.

High Island is world renowned for its productive rookery island and excellent birding during Spring Migration, but that's not all. Houston Audubon is constantly working to improve habitat for both birds and visitors alike. Come hear more about what it takes to manage High Island. Coastal Sanctuaries Manager Pete Deichmann will talk about ongoing and past habitat projects as well as plans for the future.

*This event is free and open to the public.
Please let us know if you're coming by signing up
on the Speaker Event page of our website.*

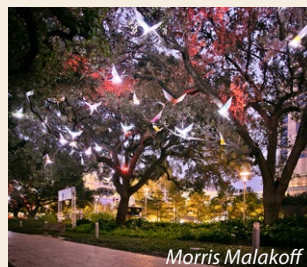


*Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway
Currently under construction at Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary*

Houston Audubon at Discovery Green

Friday, February 21 6 – 9 p.m.

Houston Audubon and Discovery Green present a screening of *The Messenger* as part of the program series supporting Paloma, a public art installation of 200 colorful aluminum "origami" birds which are illuminated after dusk and accompanied by choreographed sounds.



Morris Malakoff

At 6 p.m. our activities start with beer samples from Bakfish Brewing Co., a pop-up birding station, and a visit with the raptors.

Screening of *The Messenger*, a 2015 documentary about mankind's connection to songbirds, will be at 7 p.m.

Bird Friendly New Year's at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

Saturday, January 4 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Make a New Year's resolution to do more for nature, in nature! Join us at this event for all ages as we start 2020 off with a walk in the woods, followed by hot beverages, cookies, craft, and more in the historic log cabin.



Our Mission: To advance the conservation of birds and positively impact their supporting environments.

Houston Audubon is a financially independent 501(c)(3) charitable conservation organization registered in the state of Texas and a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Houston Audubon Office 713-932-1639
Education Office 713-640-2407
Fax 713-461-2911
E-mail info@houstonaudubon.org

houstonaudubon.org

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The Naturalist is also available in digital format on our website.

Sign up for E-News on our website for monthly updates and a link to The Naturalist.

Houston Audubon's Very Own Mixed Flock

by Stuart Nelson

Chair, Young Professionals Advisory Council

Every serious birder knows that if you're looking for something special, it's a good idea to find a mixed flock. Even on days when it seems like nothing is moving, a single mixed flock can be a game changer. I experienced this firsthand a few days ago when I made my way to Bear Creek Pioneers Park to do some casual weekend birding.

For much of the morning I was in the doldrums—not a chickadee in sight! Then, as if out of nowhere, I heard a cacophony in the trees to my left. Sure enough, a large mixed flock of Yellow-rumped Warblers, Orange-crowned Warblers, Carolina Chickadees, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets was moving through. All of a sudden, the place was hopping! I knew there was bound to be something special mixed in. As I scanned the foliage in typical twitcher fashion, something unusual caught my eye—yellow undertail coverts, pale supercilium, faint streaking on the breast, dull brown crown, and a wagging tail... A Palm Warbler, and a lifer at that! It was a splendid find, and one that I believe was only possible because I was alerted by the presence of a mixed flock.

This year, Houston Audubon had a mixed flock of its own move through. This one, however, wasn't composed of birds. Rather, it was made up of fifteen young professionals who together formed the Young Professionals Advisory Council (YPAC). From an associate at a private equity firm to a researcher at Baylor College of



YPAC members at the opening of the Raptor and Education Center

Medicine to a natural resources specialist from Houston Arboretum, this group of 20 and 30-somethings contained a rich diversity of interests and skill sets.

At our initial meeting in January, Houston Audubon staff encouraged us to think big in terms of the impact we were going to make. That first brainstorming process led to the vision of Houston Bird Week, a week-long celebration of Houston Audubon's 50th anniversary. In the same way that Bear Creek mixed flock brought with it a fantastic collection of species, this group of passionate individuals brought Houston Audubon a beautiful smorgasbord of creative projects.

We coordinated bird walks and park cleanups across the city, helping raise awareness for conservation and environmentalism. We teamed up with Bakfish Brewing Company to create PALEican, a custom bird-themed beer available in Houston-area bars and restaurants. We curated innovative programs such as Birds, Health, and the Human Spirit, which brought Houston Audubon's message to new audiences. We formed teams for the annual Birdathon, raising some serious cash. And we even assisted in working with the mayor's office to designate the Official Bird of Houston, the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron!

The immediate impact was obvious, but through it all we also formed lasting friendships and new partnerships that will positively impact Houston's culture of conservation well into the future.

It was a real joy to be a member of the YPAC this year, and I look forward to continuing my involvement in 2020. Be on the lookout—you never know what surprises the next mixed flock will bring!

Spring Migration 2020 Preview

by Richard Gibbons, Sanctuary Director

We have two main goals for the spring visitation season: maximize stopover habitat through restoration and diversification projects, and improve the visitor experience so that more people will profoundly connect with nature. To these ends, Houston Audubon staff, volunteers, and partners are working to make Spring Migration 2020 something special. You can expect the same smiling faces and knowledgeable aces to help you with your birding adventures. Houston Audubon staff and volunteers will help get you oriented and Tropical Birding will guide both birding and photography walks five days a week in and around High Island. We're expanding the Flight in Focus weekend programming and doubling the participant capacity. Please note the date change of Flight in Focus to the first weekend in May, which will be during peak bird migration when there will be lots of baby birds at the rookery.

New this spring: We'll open the brand new Kathrine G. McGovern Canopy Walkway in Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary. This 600-foot elevated boardwalk will provide an interpreted experience through the forest layers, culminating with commanding overlooks at both Smith and Claybottom ponds. We will also open new restrooms in Smith Oaks. Finally, Houston Audubon staff and volunteers will lead guided bird walks on the days that the Tropical Birding guides are recuperating and exploring. Please come see us, we can't wait to share the magic of migration with you. Visit the Houston Audubon website for more information.



• New restrooms at Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary

RV Volunteer Caretakers at High Island

Our Coastal Operations Center and Volunteer Campground at High Island features RV hookups, a kitchen, showers, and an outdoor picnic pavilion to make your volunteer experience convenient and comfortable. Take advantage of this opportunity to camp in exchange for 20 hours of service per week, performing tasks such as greeting guests, leading tours, sharing information about our bird sanctuaries, and more! Get on the list now to reserve your space by emailing Lauren Miheli at volunteer@houstonaudubon.org.

Get ready for Birdathon 2020

MARCH 20 - MAY 11

Grab some friends and go birding for a good cause! Birdathon is our annual spring fundraiser where teams compete to count as many bird species as possible in a 24-hour period, all while raising money for bird conservation.



Learn more at our
Kick-off Workshop!

MARCH 8 2 - 5 PM
EDITH L. MOORE SANCTUARY CABIN
FREE ADMISSION. PLEASE RSVP ON OUR WEBSITE.

HOUSTONAUDUBON.ORG/BIRDATHON



Saturday, February 1
10 a.m. - Noon

Two teams, two hours,
54 species!

Join us at Archbishop Fiorenza Park Phase 2 as the SUPERB Owls, led by Richard Gibbons, face off against the Gridiron Goatsuckers, led by Mary Anne Weber. Everyone is welcome to participate. You may pick either team to bird with. Details at houstonaudubon.org.



VS



Houston Audubon Raises over \$355,000 at Our Golden Anniversary Gala!

Houston Audubon celebrated 50 years of bird conservation at our Golden Anniversary Gala held at the beautiful Astorian on October 17, 2019. Highlights of the event included a silent auction, an up-close and personal bird experience with Houston Audubon's education raptors including a green-screen photo op, a formal dinner, and a video highlighting the organization's milestones and accomplishments over the last 50 years.

A special thank you to event chairs Mary Carter, Board President 2011-2013, and Gary Clark, Board President 1989-1991, as well as all of the wonderful supporters who contributed to make this a successful event.

Houston Audubon's
Golden Anniversary
gala
CELEBRATING 50 YEARS



Photos by Daniel Ortiz Photography

Houston Audubon Summer Camps

Priority registration for Houston Audubon family-level members starts on January 15 for camps at our sanctuaries. Non-members can register beginning on February 15. The education team also offers camps at Yorkshire Academy in West Houston. Registration for those camps begins in March. Check our website for details or contact Mary Anne Weber (maweber@houstonaudubon.org).



Summer Camps at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

June 1–5: Crazy Mixed-up Animal Art Camp (Ages 6–10)
June 15–19: Hoot! Tweet! Chirp! (Ages 5–8)
June 22–26: Bayou Buddies and Creek Creatures (Ages 6–10)
July 6–10: Great Migrations (Ages 7–12)
July 13–17: Crazy Mixed-up Animal Art Camp (Ages 6–10)
July 27–31: Great Migrations (Ages 7–12)

Summer Camps at the Raptor and Education Center

June 22–26: Great Migrations! (Ages 7–12)
July 20–24: Bayou Buddies (Ages 6–10)

Summer Camps at Yorkshire Academy

June 8–12: Hoot! Tweet! Chirp!
June 15–19: Great Migrations!
July 6–10: Bayou Buddies
July 13–17: Bayou Buddies

HANPA

January 8: Costa Rica Flora and Wildlife with Joe Smith

Joe photographed in three different eco-systems of Costa Rica—Sarapiquí on the lower Caribbean; Turrialba, a region a bit higher and less humid and cooler; and the high mountain country known as Savegre Valley, about 7000 feet in elevation. Each area had its own unique species and habitat. Come and see nature at its best!

February 5: Through the Rockies to Alaska A Photographic Journey with Laszlo Perlaky

Laszlo's dream to experience and photograph the remote areas of the far North became possible when he and his wife retired in June 2019. They made a three-month expedition through the Rockies, Yukon, and Alaska. Laszlo will present the highlights of their 15,000-mile trip and will illustrate it with his outstanding nature photography.

The Houston Audubon Nature Photography Association meets on the first Wednesday evening of the month from 7 to 9 p.m. at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary.

Spring Break Camp at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

March 16–20 9:00 a.m. – Noon.

Soar into the world of birds with Houston Audubon. From owls to eagles, cardinals to chickadees, this camp will bring the world of birds to life. Campers will meet lots of live birds including hawks and owls.

This camp is for 7 – 11 year olds. Priority registration for Houston Audubon members starts on January 15. Non-members can register beginning on February 15.

Winter Programs

Amazing Raptors

January 4 6–8 p.m.

Join us at the Houston Audubon Raptor and Education Center for this special evening. Our program begins with a fun interactive program on raptors. You will then meet some of the our education raptors and learn more about their natural history. This is a family-friendly program for all ages.

\$10 per adult; \$6 per child (3–17 years old)

Behind-the-Scenes Tour of the Raptor Center

January 25 8:30–10 a.m.

Learn about our native raptors and raptor conservation, meet the raptors up close with lots of photo ops, and discover what it takes to run a raptor center. This private event occurs before our open hours, and space is limited.

\$20 per adult; \$15 per child

Owl Prowls

Owl Prowls begin with a lively program on owls including a rare opportunity to meet live, rehabilitated owls. Then we go out on the sanctuary's wooded trails in search of wild owls.
Edith L. Moore Prowls: January 11, February 8
Raptor Center Prowls: January 25, February 22

Raptor Photo Shoot

Photograph our raptors in an intimate setting. Our next session is January 27 at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary. Space is limited to 15 participants.

Digital Class Reaches Virginia

When our education team isn't busy delivering excellent programs in Houston, they teach digitally all over the country from the Bayou Barn at the Raptor and Education Center. On November 14, they broadcasted three hour-long presentations to Mill Run Elementary in Northern Virginia, where the 5th graders are learning about owls. Our ambassador owls were a big hit! Pictured here is Mary Anne Weber, Education Director, with Simon, a Great-horned Owl.



November Squawk Walk

November 16 was a beautiful day for our Squawk Walk at Exploration Green in Clear Lake. The Exploration Green Conservancy is turning this former golf course into a nature park. It is now home to many more birds since the transformation began. Be sure to check it out if you're in southeast Houston!



Volunteer Orientation

Work in the Woods with Us!
Conserve Nature.
Learn New Things.

Saturday, January 18, 2020

10:00 a.m. – Noon

Edith L. Moore Log Cabin

For more info, call Lauren,
713-932-1639

lmiheli@houstonaudubon.org

If you volunteered for
Houston Audubon in 2019,
please join us for our annual

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION PICNIC

Saturday, February 29, 2020

Noon–2:00 p.m.

Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

Please RSVP by February 15 to
lmiheli@houstonaudubon.org
or call 713-932-1639

Spouses/Guests are welcome

Join Us at a Work Party!

November was an active month for volunteers. At Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary, trees were planted, litter was collected from the banks of Rummel Creek, garden and nursery tasks were completed, and trails were swept. Near Bolivar Flats, a team collected 83 bags of trash that was littering shorebird habitat. At the Raptor and Education Center the team removed invasive vines and some unsightly fencing along the bayou.

High Island

January 11 | February 8

Raptor & Education Center

January 18 | February 15

Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

January 25 | February 22



Blue-headed Vireo—*Vireo solitarius*

by Glenn Olsen, GO Birding Ecotours

Winter on the Upper Coast is such a wonderful season for birding. Cool weather, only a few mosquitos, and lots of awesome birds. One of my favorite wintering birds is the Blue-headed Vireo. You are most likely to find this



Greg Lavaty

uncommon bird hopping ever so slowly and deliberately from limb to limb in a tree as it searches for insect eggs or a lethargic insect. The white around the eye that extends to the base of the bill is quite prominent and gives the bird the appearance of wearing eyeglasses. We refer to this pattern of white as spectacles. The white of the spectacles is accented by the contrast of the soft, faded blue color of the crown and cheeks making for a distinctive head pattern. Dull olive-greenish back and wings with two dull white wing bars, white chin, throat, and belly with flanks washed in yellow complete the attire of this dashing handsome bird.

Prior to 1997 this species was a member of a three-bird group referred to as the Solitary Vireo complex. After the three were split into separate species based on DNA studies, we now have the Blue-headed Vireo (*V. solitarius*), the Plumbeous (*V. plumbeus*) and Cassin's (*V. cassinii*).

The Blue-headed Vireo winters in the southeastern states and Mexico. It is most common in our area from early November to early March. The breeding range is primarily Canada but also includes states around the Great Lakes, New England, and the Appalachian Mountains.

As the species name implies, I do not recall ever seeing two or more together. However, I think it well worth a day spent searching the trees for one of these colorful, handsome, and uncommon birds. I will look for you when I am out searching for one myself.

Upcoming Birding Classes with Glenn Olsen

- Winter Birds of the Woods and Prairie: January 7 and 11
- Winter Birds of the Coast and Marsh: February 18 and 22
- Introduction to Birding: March 17 and 21
- Warbler Identification: April 7 and 11
- Breeding Birds of the Upper Coast: May 12 and 16

*Classes consist of an evening session at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary and a field trip on the following Saturday.
See our website for more information.*

Member Field Trips

Stephen F. Austin State Park and
San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site
Saturday, January 18

JJ Mayes Wildlife Trace
Saturday, February 15

Houston Audubon field trips are open to members and a limited number of guests. Field trips are free but reservations are required. You must provide your own transportation.

Bus Trips for Seniors

Beaumont: Boardwalk
and Cattail Marsh Scenic Wetlands
Wednesday, January 29

Damuth and Winter's Bayou Sanctuaries
Wednesday, February 19

Bus trips are for Houston Audubon members who are over 50.

Free Sanctuary Walks & Monthly Bird Surveys

Scheduled monthly at urban and coastal sites. Nature enthusiasts of all skill levels welcome. Many are family-friendly. Details and dates are in the birding section of our website.

Galveston County Audubon Group

Presentation: Thursday, January 16
Winter Birding in Galveston Island State Park
Presented by Kyle O'Haver,
Assistant Park Superintendent

Field Trip: Saturday, January 18
Galveston Island State Park

Presentation: Thursday, February 13
Winter Birding on the Texas City Dike
Presented by Kristine Rivers, Birding for Fun

Field Trip: Saturday, February 15
Texas City Dike

Presentations start at 7 p.m. at the Rosenberg Library in Galveston. Our meetings and field trips are free and open to all. Details at houstonaudubon.org

Support Houston Audubon

- ☐ I would like to make a tax-deductible donation
☐ I would like to include Houston Audubon in my estate plans
☐ I would like to become a member/renew my membership

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Address _____ ☐ Please check box to indicate address change

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

Member Levels

\$500 (Gold) \$250 (Silver) \$100 (Bronze)
 \$50 (Family) \$30 (Individual)

Donate/join online at houstonaudubon.org or
 mail in this form with a check to:



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All funds remain with Houston Audubon
 in support of its mission and local sanctuaries.

Houston Audubon

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Calendar of Events

Weekly Mindful Mondays, starting in February

Weekly Titmouse Club on Tuesdays

Weekly Bayou Buddies on Tuesdays

Weekly BIRD Buddies on Fridays

January

- 4 Bird Friendly New Year's
- 4 Bolivar Beach Ramble
- 4 Amazing Raptors
- 7 Birding Class: Winter Birds of the Woods & Prairie
- 8 Nature Photography Meeting
- 9 Speaker Event with Pete Deichmann
- 11 Birding Class Field Trip
- 11 High Island Work Party
- 11 Owl Prowl at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary
- 15 Camp registration starts for Houston Audubon members
- 16 Galveston Co. Audubon Group Meeting
- 18 Houston Audubon Member Field Trip
- 18 Raptor and Education Center Work Party
- 18 Volunteer Orientation
- 18 Galveston Co. Audubon Group Field Trip
- 25 Raptor Center Behind-the-Scenes Tour
- 25 Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary Work Party
- 25 Owl Prowl at Raptor and Education Center

27 Raptor Photo Shoot

29 Bus Trip for Houston Audubon Seniors

February

- 1 Super Bird 54
- 1 Bolivar Beach Ramble
- 5 After School Nature Explorers Club
- 5 Nature Photography Meeting
- 8 High Island Work Party
- 8 Owl Prowl at Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary
- 13 Galveston Co. Audubon Group Meeting
- 15 Galveston Co. Audubon Group Field Trip
- 15 Houston Audubon Member Field Trip
- 15 Raptor and Education Center Work Party
- 18 Birding Class: Winter Birds of the Coast & Marsh
- 19 Bus Trip for Houston Audubon Seniors
- 21 Houston Audubon at Discovery Green
- 22 Birding Class Field Trip
- 22 Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary Work Party
- 22 Owl Prowl at Raptor and Education Center
- 29 Volunteer Appreciation Picnic



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